

--SPECIAL ANALYSIS--**USSR: AN IDEA FOR CONVENTIONAL ARMS CONTROL IN EUROPE**

The Warsaw pact elaboration of Gorbachev's "Atlantic to the Urals" proposal is a bid to make conventional arms control the centerpiece of intra-European dialogue for years to come. Although the plan includes unattractive elements--nuclear weapons and aircraft--it appears to have been so constructed to avoid giving grounds for immediate rejection. It calls for relatively modest cuts in NATO and pact forces in a staged approach that appears ambitious but not grandiose. The thrust of the plan appears directed at CDE phase II, but the pact avoided closing the door on any possible forum, including MBFR.

When Gorbachev announced his "Atlantic to the Urals" proposal on April 18, it appeared not to have been thought through. Details were missing (Gorbachev described the entire plan in only two paragraphs) and Soviet officials subsequently offered a variety of contradictory interpretations. The aim of the proposal in the first instance appeared to be simply to answer European concerns that in a non-nuclear world they would be at a conventional disadvantage.

Yesterday's elaboration of the proposal is clearly the result of intensive coordination on the part of working-level Soviet officials and their East European allies. Some aspects of the proposal are still unclear, but this may be deliberate, to give an appearance of flexibility.

The reduction plan. The relatively modest scope of the proposal--it did not call for total disarmament as one might have expected given Gorbachev's record--and its three-staged approach to reductions suggests the Soviets hope it will be regarded as a serious offer.

--The first step would be a one-time NATO/Warsaw pact cut of 100,000-150,000 troops within a year or two. Although the statement indicated that tactical air forces should also be cut, the wording of the statement suggests that the Soviets would not insist on including air forces in this stage.

--A second step would include 25-percent reduction of NATO/Warsaw pact land and tactical air forces by the early 1990s. All other European countries would be included in the process during a subsequent stage.

To buttress the proposal's seriousness, the pact emphasized that there are "no preconditions" for beginning discussions, that the plan is "independent" of the January 15 initiative, and that it welcomed alternative ideas. As a further effort to put a gloss on the plan, the pact stressed that the money saved from reductions would go to economic and social development.

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In addition to the bloc-to-bloc character of the initial phases, two major elements in the plan are likely to be unattractive to West European governments: inclusion of operational-tactical missiles and tactical aircraft. Were discussions to get off the ground, the Soviets would probably compromise on both issues.

--Gorbachev on April 18 was ambiguous on the question of including operational-tactical missiles (ranges up to 1,000 km); now the pact firmly states that such missiles should be reduced simultaneously with cuts in conventional forces.

--The Soviets have long been interested in including tactical aircraft in the MBFR negotiations and, before they moved to their zero-zero INF proposal, had insisted that aircraft be covered in an INF agreement. Their use of the term "tactical" leaves obscure what type of aircraft they hope to include.

Verification. As with other Soviet pronouncements over the last six months, the provisions for verification at least give the appearance of being forthcoming: reductions would be monitored by NTM and on-site inspection, and military activity by the remaining troops would also be "observed."

In addition, the plan calls for the establishment of an international consultative committee--possibly including non-bloc members--that would, among other duties, man "posts of control" at major railway centers, airports, and harbors. (This is a throwback to a concept discussed at the 1958 Surprise Attack Conference.) The plan also calls for an exchange of data, not as a basis for reductions but for the purpose of verification.

The forum. No doubt hoping to avoid criticism while inviting discourse, the pact was open-ended on the question of where its new plan should be taken up. It clearly prefers using the plan as the basis for CDS phase II. The statement refers specifically to the second stage of CDS, and the Warsaw pact communique underscored the importance of the November CSCE meeting in Vienna.

However, the pact offers alternatives, such as a "special forum" or an expanded MBFR mandate. Although the pact reaffirmed its interest in ongoing MBFR discussions in Vienna, the effect of the statement was to declare that these talks as now structured are going nowhere.

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